

Year 1
Direct Support Professional Training

Student's Resource Guide



Session #8 Outline **Teaching Strategies:** **Positive Feedback and** **Natural Times to Teach**

California Department of Education
and the
Regional Occupational Centers and Programs
in partnership with the
Department of Developmental Services
1999

List of Class Sessions

Session	Topic	Time
1	Introduction, Overview of Developmental Disabilities, Values, Diversity	2 hours
2	Communication	3 hours
3	Wellness: Nutrition, Exercise and Safety	3 hours
4	Wellness: Medications	3 hours
5	Wellness: Responding to Individual Needs	3 hours
6	Positive Behavior Support	3 hours
7	Teaching Strategies: Relationships, Task Analysis and Prompts	3 hours
8	Teaching Strategies: Postive Feedback and Natural Times to Teach	3 hours
9	Daily Living	3 hours
10	Individual Rights, Laws and Regulations	3 hours
11	Leisure and Recreation	3 hours
12	Competency Test	3 hours
Total Class Sessions		12
Total Class Time		35 hours

Key Words

In this session, the key words are:

- Positive Consequence
- Reinforcer
- Praise
- Error Correction
- Natural Teaching

Your In-Class Review Notes

This is a place for you to take notes on the review questions during this session.

1. Describe why it is important to use positive consequences in teaching.
2. Why is it a good idea to change the positive consequences we use as reinforcers when teaching?
3. Why is praise often used as a positive consequence?
4. Describe two ways we can help learners avoid making errors when learning a new skill.

Information Brief

Getting Ready for Session #8

Preparation

Before you attend Session 8, please remember to:

1. Read all of the information for Session #8 found in this *Resource Guide*.
2. After reading the information and before Session 8, **complete the assignments on pages 7 and 12**. You may need your supervisor's help in completing the activity.

Introduction

We all learn better when we are encouraged and positively motivated to learn. When teaching individuals with disabilities, providing positive consequences for an individual's effort can help the individual learn more quickly. Positive consequences used in teaching can take many forms. Praising the learner for doing something right is one way to motivate many individuals as they learn new skills. Opportunities to get a preferred item or participate in preferred activities are other ways that may motivate an individual to learn a new skill.

Positive Consequences As Reinforcers

Reinforcement is one of the most important teaching tools. When a positive consequence follows a behavior and makes the behavior more likely to occur again in the future then the positive consequence is acting as a reinforcer. Therefore, a reinforcer is a special kind of consequence because it has an effect on learning. The only way to know if a consequence is working as a reinforcer is if the individual shows progress on the skill over time. If the learner does not show progress on the skill over time, then the positive consequence is probably not a reinforcer for learning that skill even if the consequence is an item or an activity the individual seems to like. Again, the only way to know if a positive consequence – whether it be praise, opportunities to take part in preferred activities, etc. – is a reinforcer is by checking to see if the learner is making progress over time. If each month, steps of a skill are being performed with less help than during the previous month, then it is likely that a positive consequence is acting as reinforcer.

Homework Activity: Preferred Activities

List the names of three individuals with whom you work and teach. Beside each name list some of the items or activities that you know the individual likes.

Name	Preferred items and activities
1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•••••

Information Brief

Reinforcement

Reinforcement For Each Individual

Because every person is different, everyone has an individual set of reinforcers. No single item or event is reinforcing to everybody. An important job of a DSP is to find out the reinforcers that motivate the learner. There are several ways to find out what kinds of consequences might act as reinforcers for learning.

- Ask the individual (friend, family member) what things the individual likes
- Observe to see what the individual does during free time
- Provide choices of items, events and activities

However, the only sure way to know if something is a reinforcer is to use it when teaching a new skill and see if the learner improves his/her ability to do the skill over time.

Change Reinforcers

It is important to use many different reinforcers during teaching. When a reinforcer is provided too frequently, it can lose its reinforcing value. For example if an individual is provided with extra time to

look at magazines as a frequent reinforcer, the individual may lose interest in magazines. When many different consequences act as reinforcers for an individual, reinforcers can be changed and are less likely to lose reinforcing value. As a result, individuals who respond to a variety of reinforcers have more opportunities to learn.

The most common type of positive consequence used in teaching is praise and positive feedback. Praise and positive feedback can act as reinforcers for almost anybody. There are a number of good reasons to reinforce a learner using praise and positive feedback.

- Praise is a normal consequence for individuals with and without disabilities.
- People rarely get tired of being praised.
- Praise is readily available and costs nothing.
- Praise can be provided briefly and without disruption to ongoing activities.

However, even praise and positive feedback do not always act as reinforcers in all teaching situations. In the previous

session, building a positive relationship with the learner was discussed. Having a positive relationship with the individual helps to make praise and feedback more reinforcing. Working to develop a good relationship with the learner by interacting often doing things the learner likes to do will help make a staff member's praise and positive feedback more reinforcing to the learner.

Provide Positive Consequences When Teaching

When an individual is beginning to learn a new skill, positive consequences can be provided after each correctly completed step of the task analysis as well as when the learner has correctly completed the whole task. Praise is a good reinforcer to use after the learner correctly completes steps within the task analysis because praise usually does not disrupt the teaching process.

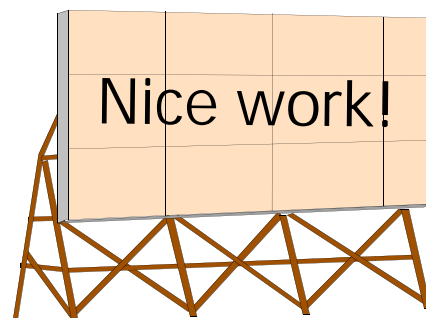
Consequences involving preferred items and activities may be better to provide after the individual completes the whole task. As the individual learns to do more of the skill independently, a positive consequence such as praise is probably not needed every time the learner does one of the steps in the task analysis. For example, if Jason does not need many prompts to complete his tooth brushing, praise is probably not needed for each step such as after turning on the water, wetting his toothbrush, etc. However, staff should continue to provide a positive consequence when the whole task is completed until the individual can do the skill independently during the daily routine.

Error Correction

Individuals will learn more quickly if they are able to practice new skills while making few or no errors instead of practicing the skill with many errors. An error is when a person does the wrong thing.

To illustrate, if a learner is being instructed to pick up a napkin and the individual tosses the napkin to the floor, the tossing of the napkin is an error. If staff see that the learner is about to make a error on one of the steps of a skill, staff should increase the help provided (give a more assistive prompt) to avoid the error. However, as anyone who has ever taught will agree, sometimes learner errors cannot be avoided.

Once an error occurs on a given step, staff should have the learner try the step again and make sure that the error does not occur the second time the learner tries the step. For example, if the learner has been verbally prompted to pick up the napkin but tosses the napkin instead, staff should return the napkin to the learner's lap, provide a more assistive prompt than the verbal prompt (i.e., a gesture or physical prompt) and ensure that the second prompt is helpful enough so that individual correctly completes the step of picking up the napkin. By providing assistance in this way, a person should never make more than one error on a given step of the task analysis during a teaching session.



Information Brief

Naturalistic Teaching

Sometimes formal teaching sessions are arranged by staff when staff can work 1:1 with an individual teaching a new skill. For example, staff may decide that 3:00 in the afternoon is a good time to work with Lucinda on using the telephone to call her friends. Scheduled teaching sessions may be needed in the early stages of learning to ensure that the individual gets enough practice on a new skill to learn it. However, it is important to teach the skill at any time during the day or in any place when and where the need for the skill arises. For example, a natural time during the day for Lucinda to practice using the telephone could be when the group decides to order a pizza for supper. Lucinda could make the telephone call to place the order.

Discovering Opportunities To Teach During The Natural Routine

Individuals will learn more quickly if they have many opportunities to practice those skills that have been identified as priorities for teaching. There are countless opportunities to teach throughout the day. As has been discussed, the more things an individual can do independently, the more control the individual has over his/her life. Typically, the more control we have over our lives, the more enjoyable our lives become. Staff should be on the "look out" for opportunities to teach new skills to help an individual become more independent. Opportunities to teach can be signaled when:

1. An individual uses a newly learned skill during the day without being prompted. (In this case, staff should praise the individual to reinforce the skill.)
2. An individual asks for help to complete a task (Staff should use a least-to-most assistive prompting strategy to help the individual correctly complete the skill and then praise his/her effort.)
3. A staff member is completing tasks for an individual that the individual could learn to do him/herself. (Staff should use a least-to-most assistive prompting strategy to help the individual correctly complete part or all of the skill and then praise his/her effort.)

Overall Goal: Assisting The Individual To Attain An Enjoyable Life Through Successful Teaching

Although opportunities to teach are found throughout the day, staff should always keep in mind that teaching must be balanced with many opportunities for individuals to participate in enjoyable, preferred activities that may not require teaching. Also, staff should look for ways to make teaching and learning a pleasant experience. The overall goal should be to help individuals with disabilities enjoy their lives. Although learning new skills can contribute to life enjoyment, staff must be careful not to let teaching efforts interfere with an individual living an enjoyable, fulfilling life.

Activity: Identify the Positive Consequence

Read each scenario. Underline the skill being taught and circle the positive consequence used to support learning.

1. Henry is learning to prepare a pizza. After Henry has completed all the steps in the task analysis for preparing the pizza, he can eat the pizza.
2. Lisa is learning to balance her checkbook. When she correctly subtracts a check from her previous balance, the DSP smiles and says, "You got that one right!"
3. Jackie is learning to cross the street in town. The first step in the task analysis is to press the crosswalk button. The DSP says, "Jackie, press the button" and Jackie presses the button. The DSP pats Jackie on the back.
4. Anna, a child with multiple severe disabilities, is learning to look at the teacher when the teacher calls her name. When the DSP calls her name, if Anna looks in the DSP's direction, the DSP gives Anna her favorite toy.

Homework Activity: Natural Teaching Times

In the first column list the name of an individual with whom you work. In the second column, list one of the skills you are teaching or would like to teach him or her. In the third column, list times during the day the skill is needed or activities the person does in which the skill could be practiced. An example has been included.

Name	Skill being taught	Times of day or activities in which the skill could be practiced
<i>Joe</i>	<i>Hand washing</i>	<i>Before meals, after using the restroom, after a messy art activity</i>

Answers to In-Class Review

1. Describe why it is important to use positive consequences in teaching.

Positive consequences: 1) motivate the individual to learn more quickly and 2) make teaching activities more enjoyable.

2. Why is it a good idea to change the positive consequences we use as reinforcers when teaching?

Learners may become tired of the same items, activities and events so that these things lose their reinforcing value from overuse. When we change positive consequences we are also more likely to find things that will motivate learning. Many opportunities to enjoy a variety of preferred activities will make an individual's life more enjoyable.

3. Why is praise often used as a positive consequence?

Almost everybody enjoys being praised. Praise is a normal consequence for people with and without disabilities. Praise is always available and costs nothing. People rarely get tired of praise.

4. Describe two ways we can help learners avoid making errors when learning a new skill.

1) If the DSP sees that the learner is about to make an error, the DSP should increase assistance so that the error is not made. 2) If the learner does make an error on a step in the task analysis, the DSP should provide enough assistance on the second attempt at completing a step so that a second error is not made.

5. Tell some ways we can identify teaching opportunities during the routine day.

Teach during times when the individual needs to use the skills they are learning as part of the normal routine. Opportunities to teach are signaled by times when an individual asks the DSP for assistance or when the DSP is doing something for an individual that the person could learn to do for him/herself.

6. What is a very important goal of teaching that DSPs should keep in mind when looking for times to teach during the daily routine?

Teaching should be positive, encouraging and as enjoyable as possible for the learner. Although we look for many opportunities to teach throughout the day, we should never teach so much that we take away from an overall enjoyable lifestyle for the individuals whom we support.

If You Want to Read More About Teaching Strategies

Curricular and Instructional Approaches for Persons with Severe Handicaps

by Cipani, E., & Spooner, F. , Editors (1994); Boston: Allyn and Bacon; ISBN: 0205140904.

Presents information and techniques instrumental in training teachers in the field of severe disabilities. Includes contributing authors who are recognized experts on the topic. Explains the current technologies and practices that best work in the classroom. Provides an overall reference for teaching practices, including procedures, programs, assessment instruction and research, concerning students with severe disabilities.

Instruction of Students with Severe Disabilities

by Snell, M.E., Editor (1993; 4th ed; New York: Merrill Publishing Co.; ISBN: 0024137510

Featuring ten completely new chapters, and eight chapters extensively revised, the Fourth Edition of this highly-successful book provides a complete portrayal of the status of education as it pertains to students with severe disabilities.

Teaching Students with Severe Disabilities

by Westling, D.L., & Fox, L. (1995); New York: Merrill Publishing Co.; ISBN: 0024265810

This is a straightforward, practical text for future teachers of students with severe disabilities . . . one whose high level of respect for persons with disabilities and their families sets the stage for students to adopt, and maintain, the same high standards. Comprehensive coverage addresses all of the issues pertinent to teaching students with severe disabilities, including both methodology and curricular areas, presenting topics in the chronological order in which a teacher would approach them: Prior considerations, planning and assessment, general instructional procedures, and, finally, procedures specific to teaching learners with certain disabling conditions.

Homework Assignment for Session #9: Making Connections

Directions: At our next meeting, we will be looking at how to help people make acquaintances, connections and friends. Before that meeting, please do the following:

1. **Think about and write out five things that your friends say they like about you.**

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2. **Think about and write down how you met two of the people you call friends.**

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